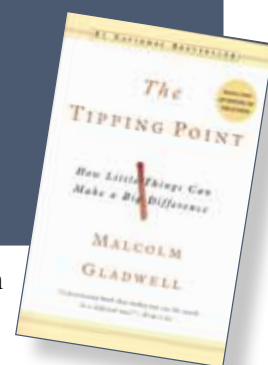


The Tipping Point

How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference

By Malcolm Gladwell

Book review provided by LT Lindsay Geiselman, Military Personnel (Code 61)



If you have walked around a mall lately, you may have found yourself within earshot of a comment about the newest styles being a throw back to days gone by, perhaps while you were standing 25 people deep in the line at the Apple store for the latest iPhone. If you are a metro rider, chances are there has been someone in your transit car buried in a good electronic book via the Kindle. If the automobile is your preferred method of transportation, I'd be willing to bet that, at any given time, you or someone you are sharing the road with is using a GPS, watching a DVD, or talking on a Bluetooth. What do all of these situations have in common? They all involve fads, trends, or the newest, must-have item. The process of creating these revolutions, dubbed by Malcolm Gladwell as, "social epidemics," is at the heart of his novel, *The Tipping Point*.

At first glance, one might think, why do I care about what is "in," especially if I am in the military? We don't have time to worry about fashion, or what product is going to make us look cool. We wear uniforms and conduct ourselves systematically and efficiently, so we bypass the whole realm of outfit popularity contests reminiscent of high school, right? Agreed. However, if you delve into the world of Malcolm Gladwell and start reading about the social interactions that are behind the scenes in the creation of a trend, you will quickly see that this book is more about human behavior, interpersonal communication, and the psychology of cause and effect within society than it is about silly bands, Facebook, Crocs or any other current fad.

Although this book opens with a nod to the resurgence of the popularity of shoes called hushpuppies, its focus is a quest to determine how increased popularity is achieved while exploring the dynamics of how ideas flourish. The "Tipping Point" is a term that refers to the point where a product, or behavior, reaches a place where it is so popular that it tips the scales and rushes over into society touching everything in its path. It is so rampant that Gladwell refers to its explosive effect as an epidemic, a disease that spreads quickly throughout the masses. He spends the entire book examining how and why this effect occurs.

Gladwell's reasoning behind the birth of a social epidemic is illustrated through various anecdotes, which subjects range from fashion to crime and even touch upon popular children's television programming. Within these stories, he uses the results of sociological case studies to define the three areas he delineates as the rules of the Tipping Point:

- 1) the Law of the Few
- 2) the Stickiness Factor
- 3) the Power of Context

The Law of the Few suggests that certain exceptional people can incite change because of their social adeptness. Gladwell does a great job of describing these types of individuals: connectors, mavens and salespeople. I couldn't help but smile as I read, thinking, "My brother is definitely a maven; my husband a salesman." The vivid and detailed portrayals of these different personality types make it likely that a reader will associate each category with the characters that comprise their own lives.

Gladwell also devotes a good amount of time to social cues and messages, both their content and context. Epidemics are influenced by the environments in which they exist, so time and place are variables that can make or break a tipping point. He places great emphasis on attention to details, strongly suggesting that sometimes it is the alteration of little things that change the big picture. For example, he uses an experiment where volunteers are made prison guards and prisoners to show how power structure in a restrictive environment can shape people's behavior. He also refers to the Broken Windows theory, suggesting that it is possible to prevent crime by making small renovations to one's surroundings such as fixing windows, cleaning up graffiti, etc. Finally, he takes a look at how differently a message can be perceived when directed towards a large group versus a smaller one. Reminding readers of the story of Kitty Genovese, a woman

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murdered in New York in 1964 while none of the 38 witnesses so much as picked up the phone to call the police, he highlights the staggering bystander apathy that can result in a big city setting. On the subject of group size, Gladwell even refers directly to military organizations, suggesting that military structures have taken notice of the link between efficiency and group size, which according to him is 150 people.

Back to the initial question: Why should you care about The Tipping Point? We spend most of our days trying to create a particular product, whether it be data spreadsheets, case files or powerpoints. We create these products because hopefully the message in them will make a difference and our idea will take off; it will sell. If enough people buy into it, we are successful. Gladwell is echoing the point that many of us knew all along, it's not just what you know, it's who you know and what you do with it. If we use attention to detail to utilize the most effective means of communication, in the most effective context, we invoke change. We can tip the scales and make a difference.

This book was certainly a good and quick read; it was full of interesting case studies and equally interesting suggestions about the cause and effect of certain social phenomenon. However, the numerous research references were so varied that instead of tipping the scales, I found that Gladwell exceeded the weight limit. By the end of the book, information overload left me feeling like I didn't know exactly which end was up. While I had a bunch of new interesting talking points to make conversation with at the next social gathering, I didn't feel like I could definitively say what a tipping point was or what the best way to achieve it would be. There was no "Aha!" no climax, no great reveal, nothing that brought his idea full circle. It reminded me of a potluck, where everyone brings a tasty little dish, but the table, while full, doesn't really have the cohesion that mom's Thanksgiving dinner does. Still, this book was enjoyable and thought provoking. So I say, go to the potluck. Have a little of this and a little of that, but when the party is over, don't expect to leave fully satisfied.

Lessons to My Children

Former Navy judge advocates and current business partner, Weston Burnett and Mark Cohen, have released a book titled *Lessons to My Children: Simple Life Lessons for Financial Success, Wealth and Abundance*. The book contains the financial advice parents should give their children. The book aims to arm parents and their children with the knowledge they need to live stress free financial lives.



Courtroom *continued from page 25*

By Lawson Almand
Administrative Law (Code 13)

It seems especially fitting to me that the courtroom in San Diego is being dedicated to RADM Carlson "Biff" LeGrand. 32 years ago I was a fresh lieutenant junior grade arriving in Guam for my first duty assignment. After 15 hours on a flight from San Francisco, I was exhausted but excited about starting my life in the Navy.

I was relieving "Scotty", the command judge advocate at the Naval Air Station. Scotty introduced me to my legal secretary, handed me the keys, and took off with a smile. I turned to leave and the phone rang. I dutifully answered, "LTJG Almand speaking, can I help you?" "This is LCDR LeGrand at the Naval legal Service Office (NLSO), who are you?" "I'm the new guy at the air station – just arrived on island and hour ago." Biff – "Stay where you are, I'll be right over!" About an hour later Biff hurried in with a stack of folders and books in his arms. "Hey, welcome aboard. I'm the head trial counsel at the NLSO. We're in the middle of a contested drug distribution case that has gone awry with some investigative problems, and you are the only one on island who isn't "tainted." I can't tell you anything other than that you need to be in court tomorrow, ready to pick this up and run with it!" He left me with the files, smiled, shook hands with me, wished me luck, and told me he would see me in the morning. Biff and the rest of the NLSO sat in the peanut gallery the next day, told me I "was doing great" during breaks, etc. By the way, I lost the case!

I took an instant liking to Biff – as most people did. His energy and affable nature immediately won you over. He always listened – a valuable trait we all need to develop. I admired and respected him. 15 years later Biff tagged me to be his executive officer at NLSO Southwest. I relieved him less than a year later when he was selected as the Deputy Judge Advocate General, and I worked for him again as the commanding officer at NLSO Northeast. I started "working" for Biff as a lieutenant junior grade, and promoted to O6 working for him 15 years later. Dedication of a courtroom to a man who spent so much time in court himself, who trained others to work in them, and who, as the CNLSC improved and constructed them, is most appropriate. I am honored to have known RADM LeGrand and the JAG Corps is better for having him as a senior partner.

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